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## Caught in EuroSport World - What I saw and What I missed

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
April 19, 2002

I have been away for the last two weeks, off into the land of EuroSport where real men play real sports in which feet figure heavily. As a result I have missed much of the action of the first two weeks of the baseball season, except for an occasional glimpse at a Mets or Yankee highlight, which seem to be the only baseball fragments shown on CNN World News.

One of the really big pieces of sports news, and one of only two things I did miss, was the NCAA Hockey Championship. The University of Minnesota is both my alma mater and the place where I learned hockey in my formative years. This was the first national championship in twenty-three years for the Gophers and of course it happened when I was out of touch. I also missed the street rioting that followed. Dinkytown was in turmoil. Do they take their hockey seriously in Minnesota? You Bet!

Although I missed the Masters I did see a few highlights of Tiger Woods' mastery of the new "Tiger proof" course in Augusta. Once again this amazing young golfer has done what has been done only on the rare occasion as only two others have won back-to-back green jackets. The one shot I saw in a highlight, and saw several times, came from Sunday's play when from the rough on the side of a hill Woods hit a fall-away shot that circled into the green and rolled on to save par. It was yet another wonderful improvisational Tiger moment as Woods continues to redefine the game of golf.

As I roamed the European Cable channels searching for real sport I found that, like here, there isn't much on. I found that Wolf Blitzer and Larry King are nearly omnipresent on CNN International. Blitzer was in Jerusalem and King was tossing up cream puff questions to people in both Washington and Jerusalem while feigning depth. The real problem was that they were preempting World Sport Tonight.

So there I was caught in EuroSportsworld.

I was soon mesmerized by the endless parade of bicycle races and motor sports on the twenty-four hour sports channels and sports news programs. I had no idea that during all of our sleeping hours in the United States there are people riding bicycles, motor bikes, and formula one

race cars all over the European landscape. Some of them are even Americans or at least posing as such by wearing uniforms proclaiming, "U.S. Post Office."

The obsession with Formula One racing seems to have reached serious levels. Michael Schumacher's name and face appeared on every sports news program I saw over a two-week period. And around and around they go downshifting and turning, twisting and accelerating their way to fame. People get really excited about this. And all along I thought soccer was the sport that the world loves best. I am rethinking that proposition and having a difficult time trying to determine if Cycling or Formula One is the biggest of European sports. Cycling seems muddier, at times.

Another revelation came while watching the British Grand National, an event complicated for me by the fact that the broadcast was in French. I must say I was totally amazed by this bit of carnage. Horses were running and jumping over hedges, crashing into hedges, falling on one another, falling on riders, and running without riders. It seemed that less than half finished the race. It looked like more fun than the XFL. Does the SPCA know about this?

The biggest EuroSport story of all came from England. In every European language and in every version of English available, the television and the newspapers were filled with the story of David Beckham's foot. This was a much bigger story than the Queen Mum's funeral. I suppose in terms of national need and interest that should have been no surprise.

The Manchester United football-star, British icon, and English demi-god broke his foot, an event of some concern under any circumstances. The great crisis stemmed from the possibility that King David might not be able to play for the English side in the upcoming World Cup, now less than fifty days away.

It seems as though the English have a national foot fetish. There were pictures of "the foot" in its cast as well as diagrams of "the foot" and its break. A rather ugly close up of "the foot" graced the front page of several British papers. I assure you this is not a pretty sight.

The most interesting reporting came from one of the London Dailies that had a full-page front-page photo of the

damaged extremity and a plea to the English football fans and all true patriots to pray for a quick healing of the break. It was even suggested that the fans "lay hands" on David's foot. Not the actual foot of course, but the photo of the actual foot. While performing the laying of hands prayers should be recited to the god of your choice who, it was once said, is an Englishman. If that still holds, David Beckham will be ready to get on the pitch for jolly old England when the World Cup commences.

To put a nice sports topper on this trip the return flight featured endless video and films. In a tribute to our post-modern post-industrial priorities eleven minutes of video were devoted to the Seven Wonders of the World. That works out to just a shade under one minute and thirty-five seconds per Wonder. Twenty-eight minutes were devoted to Dieon Sanders.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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